

Pastor Liz Kuglin-Alyea's Sermon for June 21, 2026
Turn to God... Walk in God's Ways

This month—June—is National Indigenous History Month, a time to honour the histories, cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. Since 1996, June 21 has been declared National Aboriginal Day in Canada and this year marks the 30th anniversary of the celebration. In the Anglican and many other denominations, June 21st also marks the National Indigenous Day of Prayer, a day to honour Indigenous Peoples, celebrate Creator's gifts, and recommit to the shared work of healing, right relationship and renewed life in Christ.

This month—June—is also PRIDE month, celebrating the contributions, resilience, and culture of 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals while promoting equality and acceptance. It serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle against discrimination and the importance of visibility for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Today, in just a few hours, members of this congregation will take part in the PRIDE parade here in Duncan, a “celebration of love, diversity and acceptance”, as Rev. Theo wrote in this week's Beacon.

And yesterday, June 20th, although not lifted to any great degree locally, was World Refugee Day, which celebrates the strength and courage of people who have been forced to flee their home country to escape conflict or persecution. This recognition is based on the principle that safety must never depend on nationality, wealth, race, religion, gender, political opinion or migration status. Protection is fulfilled only when people forced to flee can live without fear, rebuild their lives, contribute to their communities and, when conditions allow, return home voluntarily, safely and with dignity.

There is so much to think about and act on this weekend, both communally and individually. Because, you see, communally, neither has the Church always been faithful to the way of love that Jesus taught and exemplified, nor have we as individuals always been faithful to Jesus' teachings. Kurt Struckmeyer, in his book, 'A Conspiracy of Love', writes, *“At the heart of Christianity is a powerful ethic. It is what the first followers of Jesus called the Way—a way of living based on love and compassion, reconciliation and forgiveness, inclusion and acceptance, peace and nonviolence, generosity*

and justice. This ethic is what makes Christianity good. Without it, Christians can become rigid and intolerant, self-righteous and condemning, hate-filled and violent, selfish and unjust. In other words, without the ethic of Jesus, Christians can represent the worst humanity has to offer.”

We are all too aware of the consequences of our communal and individual thoughts, words and actions. And no matter how open-minded, socially conscious, anti-racist we think we are, we can still have old, learned, hidden biases that need examining. It is our responsibility, as the Church and as individuals, to examine ourselves for our stereotypes, prejudice, and ultimately, discrimination.

Jesus left his disciples with a new commandment, *“Love one another as I have loved you”* (John 13: 34-35). By times, and sometimes conveniently, his commandment has been interpreted as applying only to those within the Christian faith. However, Jesus’ love commandment is placed firmly within the context of the great two commandments, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’”* (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19: 18b,33-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12: 29-30; Luke 10: 25-28). The Church collectively and each one of us individually are agents, in our society and the world around us, of that same love by which God first loved us. We might find Paul’s imagery helpful just as it helped the early church understand its identity and mission. We are ambassadors, he writes, active representatives of God’s love, living in the now but carrying the values, hope, and message of the Kingdom of God to which we belong. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

So, here’s an experiment. Participate with me and use your imagination, paint a mental picture, if you will, of the scenario which I’m going to describe. Your home is one that has garbage and recycling dumpsters located on the property. Or if you own your own home, imagine having set the garbage and recycling bins out early for the next-day pick-up. Are you picturing this? It’s a Sunday morning. You’re all ready to leave for the worship service and you decide to take out the garbage on your way. But on coming closer to the garbage and recycling dumpsters, or bins, you first see a bicycle leaning up against an adjacent fence, over-laden with bags of tin cans. What’s your first

reaction? Then, your eyes shift to someone digging through the waste. It's hard to identify them. Could be an indigenous person, or a queer person, or a refugee, or someone, anyone at all. Now what's your reaction? Stay with me. You have two options. Well, three, actually, if you count turning around, going back into your home and plopping your garbage bag on the kitchen floor until you get back from worship. The second option is to avoid the dumpsters or bins altogether, deciding to deposit your garbage bag in the trunk of your car to deal with later, notwithstanding that the temperature will be a healthy 30 degrees plus when worship is over. However, the third option might be this: picture it with me. You call out, *"Good morning. I don't want to scare you. I have a bag for the garbage dumpster. Just don't poke it because it has cat litter in it."* The someone looks up and says, *"Good morning"* back to you. *"I don't poke the bags,"* the someone says, *"I just jiggle them to hear if they have cans in them."* *"Well,"* you say, *"have a good day"* and with that you start to walk away. But as you go, the someone calls out, *"Thank you. God bless you."* And as you continue walking, you realize that you have received a blessing even before you've gotten to the church door.

People of God, on this weekend, on this day, on any day of the week, what option would you choose? How would you act? How would you love?
Let us pray:

Loving God, open our hearts and minds to see what you see, to love as you love and to give as you have given. Open our eyes to see the human-set limitations that hinder our ability to effectively love all people and your creation well. Call us out to act like Jesus. Challenge us to love like Jesus.

Amen